

Malachi 3:1-4

Luke 1:68-79 (In place of Psalm)

Philippians 1:3-11

Luke 3:1-6

Sermon December 5th, 2021

God Forgives Us

In our gospel this morning, John invites people to repent. To let go of their pride. Their anger. Their guilt. To prepare their hearts to receive the forgiveness Jesus will offer them. So, they can take up their crosses and follow Jesus. So, they can live out the love Christ will reveal to them.

When I hear John's invitation this morning, I reflect back on moments in my life where I said or did something that hurt someone I love. I think of the collection of emotions I felt as I went from that moment where I was confronted, to the moment I repented.

Usually, when we hurt someone, we have to work through this pride and anger that seem to linger within us. Most of us know this as stubbornness (**Image**). We become vulnerable when we admit we said or did something wrong. Our natural instinct is to avoid becoming vulnerable. Because being vulnerable to someone else makes us weak. Or this is what we are taught to think about being vulnerable.

After we take time to reflect on the conflict, we more often than not, start to peel away at the pride and anger that have prevented us from repentance and healing.

Unfortunately, this pride and anger act as a wall to protect us from the pain that comes with feeling guilty. So, once this wall falls down. Then we start to feel the sting of guilt. And as we all know; guilt can be a hard emotion to feel. It usually impacts us as much physically as it does emotionally. Our stomach aches (**Image**). Our chest feels heavy. Our head hurts. This is why we have so much trouble letting go of our pride and anger in the initial stages of a confrontation.

However, when we feel guilt, we are moved to repent (**Image**). Most of the time.

On occasion we may still struggle to repent even when feeling the sting of guilt. What can happen to us sometimes is our guilt lingers inside us too long, and turns into shame. Maybe, we avoid dealing with our guilt. Or, don't know what supports to access to work through our guilt. Unfortunately, when our guilt turns to shame this becomes yet another barrier that makes it hard for us to repent.

Now, I want to be clear that not all shame we feel is connected to something we did to hurt someone else. Many people feel shame, because the community has labelled them a certain way without them doing anything to hurt someone.

Many people who are victims of abuse feel shame. Because at times some have taught us that people who are victims of these abuses could have prevented them in some way or another. Unfortunately, these beliefs have hurt many people in our community.

So, when I am talking about shame today, I am not referring to people in this situation. I am talking specifically in the context where we said or did something that hurt someone we loved.

What happens when we struggle with these emotions when saying or doing something hurtful is it makes it harder for us to accept the forgiveness God has to offer. It makes it harder for us to heal so that we can continue to be the people God created us to be. It makes it harder for us to love God and one another.

One example that comes to mind for me is the collective guilt many of us are feeling over the findings of the unmarked graves at former residential schools (**Image**). We have seen firsthand in recent months how traumatic these schools were for our indigenous neighbours. More and more of us are wanting to help our indigenous neighbours heal from these past wounds.

At the same time, in conversations with Elders around Calgary, I have heard Elders state that reconciliation is a healing process for both indigenous and non-indigenous people. We need healing too.

Indigenous people need to heal from their wounds. We need to heal from our collective guilt that has prevented us from being full participants in this reconciliation process.

Sometimes when we see what has happened to our indigenous neighbours, we struggle to see that we all need healing. Guilt is a powerful emotion that can linger, and has lingered in us as settler people. Some would argue that this guilt has turned to shame. This has prevented many of us from genuinely repenting. This has prevented many of us from listening. This has prevented many of us from walking on the path towards healing and reconciliation with our indigenous neighbours.

In our gospel this morning, John is in the wilderness (**Image**). A place where people go who are exiled from their communities. Sometimes due to being labelled for something out of their control. Sometimes due to saying or doing something hurtful to someone in their community. For the latter, these emotions of pride, anger, and guilt are getting in the way of them being able to receive God's forgiveness. They are getting in the way of them living out their call as God's people. To love God and their neighbours.

In response to their struggles, John proclaims that Jesus is coming. The messiah is coming (**Image**). So, repent. Let go of the pride, anger, and guilt that is holding you back from living out your identity as a child of God. Listen to Jesus' gracious invitation

to follow him. To leave behind those things that you say and do that hurt one another, so you can love one another as Jesus loves you.

Receive God's forgiveness so that you will be made new.

This is the message the people hear in the wilderness as they await the coming of the Messiah. This is the message we hear as we await the return of the Messiah.

Repent. Let go of the pride, anger, and guilt that is holding us back. Receive God's forgiveness so that we will be made new. So, we can be the kingdom Jesus invites us to be. Moving forward together with those we hurt on a path towards healing and reconciliation (**Image**).

Let us pray, gracious God, open our hearts to repent to you and to one another when we are stuck in our pride, anger, and guilt. Forgive us. Renew us. So that we can be the kingdom you created us to be. Loving one another as you love us. Walking together with our indigenous neighbours and others we have hurt on a path towards healing and reconciliation. **Amen.**

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